

Remarks at Jacksonville Port in Jacksonville, Florida
July 25, 2013

The President. Hello, Jacksonville! Well, it is good to be in Jacksonville. Good to be back. How you all doing today?

Audience members. Good!

The President. You look good.

Audience member. Thank you!

Audience member. You look good too!

The President. Thank you. [Laughter]

I want to thank Jacksonville Port Authority Chairman Joe York. Give him a big round of applause. I want to thank the CEO of MOL America, Tsuyoshi Yoshida. I want to thank everybody here at JAXPORT for having me here today. I brought along our new Secretary of Transportation, Anthony Foxx. He is here. We've got wonderful Congresswoman Corrine Brown here. Yay, Corrine! Mayor Alvin Brown is also in the house.

And I would like to recognize the folks from the port and TraPac for showing me the cranes you've got back at the terminal. Those are some big cranes. [Laughter] This is some serious business here. And just watching what was going on down here and knowing what's possible is a reminder of all the potential that we've got in this country: to put folks to work, to rebuild America, to make sure that everybody has got a fair shot.

Well, yesterday, in Illinois, I talked about what we need to do as a country to build a better bargain for the middle class and everybody who's trying to get into middle class, a strategy that we've got to pursue, together, to make sure that everybody who works hard has a chance to get ahead in this 21st-century economy. Because, for decades, a growing middle class was the engine of our prosperity; it's what made us great. If you worked hard, you knew your work was going to be rewarded with fair wages, good benefits, the chance to buy a home, save for retirement, and most of all, the chance to pass down a better life to your kids. That's the American Dream.

But eventually, that engine of prosperity began to stall. You had technology that made some jobs obsolete. You had globalization, which meant some jobs got shipped overseas. Unions got weaker, in part because some of the laws that we passed. And so for most of the last decade, people were working harder and harder just to get by. And then you have a devastating recession because of what happened in the financial markets, and that cost millions of Americans their jobs and their homes and their savings. And what it did was lay bare for everybody to see the steady erosion of middle class security that had been happening for almost a generation.

Now, the good news is that after nearly 5 years since that financial crisis happened, thanks to the hard work and the resilience of the American people, America has fought back. So together, we saved an auto industry. And I was told that the terminal I was at is one of the places where we're sending out more American cars than ever before, all around the world.

We took on a broken health care system. We invested in new American technologies to reverse our addiction to foreign oil. We doubled our production of clean energy. We put in place tough new rules on the big banks and the mortgage lenders and credit card companies to make sure that we didn't have the same kinds of financial shenanigans that we had seen before. We changed a Tax Code that was too skewed in favor of the wealthy, made sure it was doing more for middle class and working class families. We locked in tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans, and then we asked folks at the top to pay a little bit more.

So you add all this up, and over the last 40 months, our businesses have created 7.2 million new jobs—7.2. And this year, we're off to our strongest private sector job growth since 1999—strongest job growth in over a decade.

So today, we sell more products made in America to the rest of the world than ever before. Our exports have surged. We produce more natural gas than any country on Earth. We're about to produce more of our own oil than we buy from overseas. That's the first time that's happened in nearly 20 years. The cost of health care is growing at its slowest rate in 50 years. And our deficits are falling at the fastest rate in 60 years. So you've got health care costs starting to slow down, deficits plummeting, jobs up, exports up, energy production up.

We've cleared away the rubble from the financial crisis, thanks to the grit and resilience of the American people, and we've begun to lay a new foundation for stronger, more durable, more sustainable economic growth. And with the revolutions that are coming in energy and technology and manufacturing and health care, we're poised to be able to finally reverse some of those forces that were hurting middle class families for so long. We can start rebuilding an economy where everybody who works hard can get ahead. That's our goal.

But I'm here to tell you today what you already know: We're not there yet. In a lot of ways, those trends that have been building for decades, this winner-take-all economy where a few folks are doing better and better and better at the top and everybody else is just treading water, those trends have been made worse by the recession. And reversing those trends should be Washington's highest priority. It's my highest priority.

Unfortunately, over the past couple of years in particular, Washington hasn't just ignored the problem, a lot of times, it's made things worse. And sometimes, when you're on the outside, you look, and it just sounds like a bunch of noise, and you don't know what's going on between Democrats and Republicans. And my attitude is, is that we're all Americans first and no party has a monopoly on good ideas. And I think there are a number of Republicans out there who mean well, although they're not always willing to say so, because they might get in trouble. *[Laughter]*

But right now we've seen a group of Republicans in the House, in particular, who suggest they wouldn't vote to pay the very bills that Congress has already racked up. That harmed our recovery back in 2011. It would severely harm it again. It could plunge us back into financial crisis.

Over the last 6 months, the gridlock's gotten worse. There are a number of Republican Senators who are trying to get things done. They passed a strong immigration bill that economists say will boost our economy by more than a trillion dollars. But so far, we haven't been able to get the House Republicans to give it a vote.

And if you ask some of these same folks about how they'd strengthen the middle class, they'll tell you, well, out-of-control Government spending is the problem, despite the fact that as a share of the economy we have cut the deficit by nearly half since I took office. Or they'll

say Obamacare is the problem; the problem is that we're trying to give health insurance to millions of Americans who don't have it. Now, I've got to tell you, our businesses have created jobs at nearly twice the pace of the last recovery, when there was no Obamacare, so it's kind of hard to figure how Obamacare is actually the problem, giving people health insurance. And by the way, tens of millions of Americans now have new benefits like free checkups and cheaper medicine on Medicare. So they don't think that's a problem.

The point is, with an endless distraction of political posturing and phony scandals and Lord knows what, Washington keeps taking its eye off the ball. And that needs to stop. We've got to stop with the short-term thinking. We've got to stop with the outdated debates. That's not what the moment requires: a focus on the core economic issues that matter to you, that matter to middle class Americans, all those who are trying to get in the middle class. That's what this moment requires. We've got to stay focused on how do we build an economy that works everybody. That's my focus.

And as Washington prepares to enter another budget battle, another budget debate, the stakes could not be higher. At a time when we need to make investments to create jobs and strengthen the middle class and grow our economy—because we've got competition coming from all around the world—we've got some of the House Republicans who put forward a budget that does just the opposite. They're pushing bills that would cut education, cut science, cut research, prevent us from meeting these priorities.

We should be doubling down on American clean energy technology; they're creating jobs, lowering dangerous carbon pollution. But they want to protect taxpayer giveaways to big oil companies. Let other countries win the race for the jobs of the future. That doesn't make sense.

Instead of helping hard-working students afford the college degree that the jobs of tomorrow increasingly demand, they want to slash funding for the very grants that help students make their tuition payments. Instead of giving more families the security of decent health care, they want to let insurance companies reinstate lifetime dollar limits and drop millions of people from their plans.

And if we don't make the necessary investments to ensure that America is a magnet for good jobs—investments in education, manufacturing, research, and transportation and information networks—we're just waving the white flag of surrender to other countries as they forge ahead in this global economy. That kind of attitude is saying there's nothing we can do to help middle class families compete and win and grow. And that's a bad bargain for the middle class.

So that's why I came down to Jacksonville today. I want you involved in this debate and remind Washington what's at stake. And over the next several weeks, in cities and towns just like this one, I'm going to lay out my ideas for how we build on the cornerstones of what it means to be middle class in America, what it takes to work your way into the middle class in America, and what we can do to help families, not help special interests, but help families. That's what we need.

And by the way, Jacksonville, what we need isn't a 3-month plan or even a 3-year plan, we've got to have a long-term plan based on steady, persistent effort to reverse the forces that are conspiring against middle class families. That's what I'm pushing for. And like I said, I think that there are Democrats and Republicans who understand what's at stake, and I'm going to

welcome ideas from anybody across the political spectrum. But I'm not going to let gridlock or inaction or indifference to the plight of families get in the way of this country.

So where I can act on my own, I'm going to act on my own. I won't wait for Congress. Because the choices we make right now will determine whether or not every American will have a fighting chance in the 21st century.

So we know what those cornerstones of real middle class security are: a good job with good wages; a good education; a home you can call your own; affordable health care that's there for you when you get sick; a secure retirement even if you're not rich; more chances for folks to earn their way into the middle class as long as they're willing to work hard for it.

But I'm here today to specifically talk about the cornerstone, the essence of middle class security, and that's a good job in growth industries. We've got to help more manufacturers bring more jobs back to America. We've got to keep creating good jobs in manufacturing. We've got to create good jobs in wind and solar energy. We've got to tap into this natural gas revolution that's bringing energy costs down in this country, which means manufacturers now want to locate here because they're thinking that we've got durable, reliable supplies of energy. We've got to create more jobs today doing what you're doing right here at JAXPORT, and that's building this country's future.

We need modern schools for our kids. We need modern power grids and fuel networks that can withstand stronger storms. And we need modern ports so we can move more goods made in America out to the rest of the world.

If you want to create jobs right now, but also jobs that will have impacts for years, here's the way to do it. We know strong infrastructure is a key ingredient to a thriving economy. That's how the United States became the best place in the world to do business. Unfortunately, over the past 2 years, too many folks in Washington have been cutting these investments. The world can't wait for Congress to get its act together.

So let me give you an example; many of you are familiar with this. In a couple of years, new supertankers are going to start coming through the Panama Canal. Those supertankers can hold three times the amount of cargo. We want those supertankers coming here to Jacksonville. Right? If we've got more supertankers coming here, that means more jobs at the terminals. That means more warehouses in the surrounding area. That means more contractors are getting jobs setting up those warehouses. That means they've got more money to spend at the restaurant. That means the waitress has more money to spend to buy her iPod. It starts working for everybody.

If we want our workers and businesses to compete, then our ports have to be ready to receive those supertankers. Otherwise, they'll go to Brazil or some other place.

Audience member. You tell them, Mr. President!

The President. So that's why last year I acted without Congress, and I took executive action to speed up the permitting process that gets workers breaking ground on projects like this one. And then private companies came onboard here at JAXPORT. They saw it as a good investment. And we're building the same kind of partnerships across the country, especially by the way, in some of these Gulf ports: Charleston, Savannah. And now these ports are on track to be better prepared for those supertankers and their cargo loads ahead of schedule.

But we've now got to keep at it. The businesses of tomorrow will not locate near old roads, outdated ports; they're going to go to places where the ports are good, the roads are good, the

rail lines are good, you've got high-speed Internet, you've got high-tech schools, trained workers, systems that move air traffic and auto traffic faster.

Think about it in terms of your own house, right? The—if you've got a leaky roof and you haven't done the tuck-pointing and the boiler is getting kind of old and rickety, you can say to yourself, well, I'm going to save money by not fixing my roof. And I'm going to save money by not getting a new boiler. And I'm not going to worry about that tuck-pointing. And then, 2 years later, 5 years down the road, what happens? House starts breaking down. You end up spending more money.

We can't defer things that we know we're going to have to do and, by the way, would put people to work right now doing them. But that's what we're doing right now. As a share of our economy, we're investing less in rebuilding America than we did two decades ago. We're spending less on fixing our infrastructure than China is, than Germany is. All our competitors, they know we've got to start taking care of this stuff. We're lagging behind.

And the irony is, right now it's cheaper to build than it's been since the 1950s. You've got a whole bunch of construction workers who are looking for work right now. You've got a whole bunch of contractors who will come in under—with low bids, and they'll come in on time.

So now is the time for us to do it. The longer we put this off, the more expensive it will be, the less competitive we'll be. So why aren't we doing it? Now, part of it's just politics right now. But making sure we've got world-class infrastructure, that shouldn't be a partisan issue. That's an American issue. It's not a Republican or a Democratic issue.

But this year's budget cuts have delayed two important rapid transit projects right here in Jacksonville that would carry more people into downtown, alleviate congestion at the same time, and put more Floridians back to work.

We can do better than that. There's a bipartisan bill in the Senate to fund critical improvements in our highways and our bridges, our transit and rail systems, and our ports like this one. And so the House should act quickly on that bill. Let's get more Americans back on the job doing the work America needs done. That will be good for middle class families. That will be good for middle class security. That will be good for homeownership. That will be good for education. That is the smart thing to do. Let's get past politics and do it.

I tell my Republican friends, this is not a partisan issue. The first Republican President is a guy from my home State. He was a pretty good President, named Abraham Lincoln. *[Laughter]* He had a whole lot of things to worry about, had a Civil War, probably the biggest crisis that this country ever experienced. And yet, in the middle of that, he was still thinking about how do we build that transcontinental railroad? How are we going to widen our canals and our ports so that we can move products all around the country and eventually the world? How do we invest in land-grant colleges so that our workers are now skilled and can get those new jobs? We're going to invest in the National Science Foundation to make sure that we stay ahead of everybody else when it comes to technology.

He made those investments, the first Republican President. He didn't say, well, that's not the job of government to help do that. He wouldn't have understood that kind of philosophy, because he understood there are some things we can only do together. And rebuilding our infrastructure is one of them.

Creating more good jobs, a better bargain for the middle class, helping folks who are working to join the middle class, an economy that grows from the middle out—this isn't what

I'm going to be focusing on for the next few months, this is what I'm going to be focusing on for all the days I've got left in my Presidency. I've counted them, there are 1,266 days left—1,266 days left.

So, over the next several weeks, we're going to roll out these plans. We're going to take them across the country. We're going to ask not just Congress to do something, we're going to ask everybody for their help: CEOs, workers, college presidents, students, Democrats, Independents, and yes, Republicans.

I'm laying out my ideas to give the middle class a better shot. And if the Republicans don't agree with me, I want them to lay out their ideas. If they've got a better plan to create jobs to rebuild our infrastructure and make sure that we've got great ports all along the Gulf, come on, let me know what your ideas are. I'm listening.

If they've got better ideas to make sure every American knows the security of affordable health care, well, share it with the country. Repealing Obamacare and slashing our budgets in education and research and infrastructure, that's not an economic plan. There's no economist who would look at that and say, well, that's the way we're going to help middle class families; we're really going to grow doing that.

Shutting down the Government just because I'm for keeping it open, that's not an economic plan. Threatening that you won't pay the bills in this country when we've already racked up those bills, that's not an economic plan. That's just being a deadbeat. *[Laughter]*

So put out some plans. I don't claim to have a monopoly on every good idea. *[Laughter]* I don't. And I'm happy to steal good ideas from anybody, because I just want to make things work. And it may seem hard sometimes, but if we're willing to take a few bold steps, if Washington will just shake off its complacency and set aside just this kind of constant gridlock and "my way or the highway" attitude, then our economy will be better a year from now, just like it's better now than it was last year. And it will be better 5 years from now. And it will be better 10 years from now.

And I'm going to spend every single minute of every day, as long as I have the privilege of this office, making sure that I'm doing everything in my power to make this economy work for working Americans again: to build a better middle class and to make sure the American Dream is something that's alive and real and achievable for decades to come.

That's what I'm fighting for, Florida. That's what I need you for, Florida. Let's make it happen. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. in the Port Terminal Building.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Jacksonville Port in Jacksonville, FL.

Locations: Jacksonville, FL.

Names: Brown, Alvin; Brown, Corrine; Foxx, Anthony R.; York, Joseph S.; Yoshida, Tsuyoshi.

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